

## ENTITLED, SUMMERHALL, EDINBURGH

Who theatre is for — and especially who gets to make it — is one of the big questions fuelling the work of Quarantine. In the past this Salford-based company has presented theatrically staged family parties (as in the mother-and-son show Susan & Darren), shared meals and journeys in the dark for one audience member at a time. They're known for working with experienced performers and those who might never have set foot onstage before, probing beneath surface assumptions by using real-life stories and the communal aspect of theatre to reveal what makes individuals tick.

Created in collaboration with the Royal Exchange Theatre, the company's latest work throws a spotlight on some of those who, despite a professional involvement in the theatre, are rarely or maybe never seen or heard. The cast of Entitled consists of three technicians, two dancers, a dancer-turned-musician and a writer who in this show has a chance to strut her stuff. Directed by Richard Gregory, this unusual performance is deceptively free-form and the overall tone deliberately low-key.

The techies are the first ones we meet. Greg Akehurst, Chris Whitwood and Jess Penny speak directly to us as they go about their business setting the lights, doing sound checks and, later, laying down a low floor. Gradually the (other) performers drift on. Joanne Fong, gorgeous to watch, is an award-winning dancer who at the age of 40 is just discovering her onstage voice. She's known the guitar-toting John Kilroy since he was a fellow dance student; they were, in fact, lovers for a spell. He throws out some spidery rock chords and briefly explains his approach to songwriting. The dancer Fiona Wright is equally diffident, her delicate reticence contrasting with Fong's more upfront manner. The playwright Sonia Hughes rounds out the cast, sharing autobiographical details but also drawing the audience together by pointing out how much she doesn't know about us.

Underpinned by ideas about audience expectation and cultural privilege, all of this is much less dry than it might sound. But, rewarding as Entitled is, it's not the easiest show to watch. In performance terms there's no direct pay-off; all the preparations are

made for a big song-and-dance number that never arrives. And yet there's something special going on here as Quarantine tries to reach into areas of the theatrical experience others companies ignore.

\*\*\*\*- Donald Hutera, The Times September 2011